



Hermosa Beach News

Councilman leads volunteers to promote county's energy program

by **Eric Michael Stitt**

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Hermosa Beach is once again leading the eco-friendly charge.

Councilman Michael DiVirgilio has formed a volunteer group of residents that will promote, educate, and assist Hermosa Beach homeowners in taking advantage of Los Angeles County's energy upgrade program.

The county was given \$35 million in federal grant funding that offers residents up to \$6,000 in rebates if they turn their house green. The program sets \$4,500 aside to reimburse homeowners looking to reduce their energy use. Between now and Labor Day, the county is kicking in an extra \$1,500 for those who take part in the environmental program this summer, according to Melinda Barrett, program manager/public relations manager for Los Angeles County.

DiVirgilio first heard about the energy upgrade program from a seminar at the South Bay Environmental Services Center. He learned that L.A. County only had 45 homeowners participating in this rebate offer. He expected the number of applicants would be enormous. But because county residents are either unaware of or misinformed about the program, he figured Hermosans, given their recent victory for committing to conserve water and several years of conducting environmentally friendly projects, should be able to lead the efforts in improving energy savings.

"Now is the time for us to turn our effort on and start helping out," DiVirgilio said. "We're going to make it even more successful."

He said the volunteer group has created a Web site called www.greenideacity.org and initially plans to distribute fliers door to door and reach out to nonprofit groups to inform residents of this unique opportunity.

Barrett was ecstatic when she heard about Hermosa Beach's interest in helping promote the program. She said it was the only city in L.A. County to contact her right away.

"Hermosa Beach was the first city that came to us and said we really want to do something," Barrett. "Hermosa Beach is the first city that joined our effort. Their enthusiasm and proactive approach has been very special, and we're thrilled."

Since then, Santa Monica, Palmdale and Claremont have stepped up to inform their residents of the \$6,000 incentive, she said.

Marilyn Lyons, program manager for the SBESC, said she's well aware of Hermosa Beach's love for eco-friendly projects and said, "It was a dream come true," when DiVirgilio said he wanted to form a volunteer group to focus on the little green beach city.

"It's such a win-win. That's a great city to work with," Lyons said. "We're hoping this will be a model for the rest of the South Bay cities."

Barrett said on average, residents have spent \$5,000 to \$15,000 on upgrades before receiving up to \$6,000 in rebates. Residents are required to select a participating contractor who will assess their home and perform the upgrades. She said those who make their homes more energy efficient can see up to a 30-percent decrease per month on energy use. To start, residents should visit www.energyupgradeca.org/lacounty.

DiVirgilio has gathered about a dozen volunteers to reach out to fellow Hermosans. And he's hoping to attract 20 more people to help. One resident who joined the effort is Robert Fortunato, who is building a zero-carbon home called the Green Idea House. He said the group is busy planning ways to reach out to as many Hermosans as possible.

"We are organizing a series of events and communications that bring awareness to anyone who might be considering upgrading their property," Fortunato said. "It is an easy sell because these upgrades save owners money, promote comfortable and healthy indoor environments and increase the resale or rental values. Helping the planet is an added bonus."

He said the quickness of the group's formation shows how much Hermosa Beach residents are dedicated to improving the environment. He said the benefits are endless.

"These efforts demonstrate Hermosa Beach's commitment to a carbon-neutral future," Fortunato said. "It may take a while, but the economic and health benefits of doing so are undeniable."

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